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THE WORK OF THE COMFORTER.

A

S E R M O N,

IN BEHALF OF THE KING'S COLLEGE HOSPITAL,

PREACHED IN

THE CHAPEL OF THE COLLEGE,

ON SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 1846.

BY

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ARCHDEACON OF CHICHESTER.

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&c., &c.

ST. JOHN xiv. 16.

I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter.

LAST Sunday we fulfilled the cycle of Feasts by which the Church, year by year, bears witness to the great object of faith, the mystery of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And now we have entered upon the long season which is a shadow of our life on earth, waiting for the advent of our Lord. The succession of festivals through which we have passed is a memorial of the measured and gradual revelation of the great mystery of the faith, from the coming of the Word made Flesh to the coming of the Holy Ghost. In this season we enter, as it were, upon the ministration of the Spirit. The Son of God, the second Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, is come and gone away into heaven, having revealed to us the Father and the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God, the third Person, is with us now, abiding in His stead. This is the fulfilment of our Lord's most gracious promise.

See how great was His divine compassion. "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter."

1. While He was in the world He was their "Comforter." His gentle countenance and gaze of love, His gracious words, and touch of almighty power, these were their daily consolation. What more did they need? While He was with them how could they have another Comforter? All sorrows gathered round Him; mourners clung to Him; the sick and the blind stretched out their hands to Him: consolation streamed from Him on every side. In the house of the sick, and at the grave of the dead, a virtue went out of Him both of healing and of life. His touch stayed the bier, and the kiss of His feet was the solace of penitents. When the time was come for Him to depart out of the world unto the Father, "having loved His own while He was in the world He loved them unto the end*."

2. And therefore when He went away He sent them another Comforter. Another—thereby shewing that He should be, not a mere power or emanation, but a *person*,—one equal to Himself, therefore God. "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." *How* then could He be with them who was gone? By the unity of the ever-blessed Trinity. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit. But where the Son is, there is the Father: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And where the Spirit is, there is the Son: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

* St. John xiii. 1.

And *how* could the Spirit be said to come who was already in the world? How could the Spirit be said to come on the day of Pentecost? He was in the world from the beginning of the creation. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*." He strove with all flesh upon the earth. He "spake by the prophets." He sanctified the saints of old. The same might be asked of the Son. How could the Son be said to come into the world? He made the worlds. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made†." He appeared in angelic forms; He was in the bush that burnt in Horeb, and in His church in the wilderness. How then could He be said to come? In a new manner. He came by Incarnation. He came in the flesh. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God;" and again, "A body hast thou prepared me‡."

So with the coming of the Holy Ghost. He came after a new *manner*. He came not incarnate, —not in a natural body,—nor by personal union as the Son; but by indwelling presence in the mystical body, regenerating all the members of Christ, and binding them in one.

This is a mystery so closely related to the Incarnation as to be rather a part of it than distinct from it. The mystical body of Christ is the visible presence of the Comforter. He came as He had never come before. The Church is the abiding

* Gen. i. 2.

† St. John i. 3.

‡ Heb. x. 5, 9.

mystery of the incarnation, deriving its life, sanctity, and perpetuity from its Head, the Word made Flesh. The Holy Church in all the world, these eighteen hundred years, perfecting the elect people of God by a new and inscrutable ministration of the Spirit, is the organized form through which the Comforter works out the will of Christ, and gathers in the fruits of His passion.

Such, then, is the Divine Person who is come to us to be our Guide. We are under the dispensation of the Comforter. Let us go on to examine in particular what is intended in this gracious title.

God has called Himself Maker, Father, and Saviour: and as if these were all too little, and too remote, in condescension and pitiful compassion to our infirmities and sorrows, He calls Himself the Comforter.

Now the word Comforter is not as wide and deep as the original word, Paraclete. It is a true, but not adequate rendering. It represents a part of the Spirit's office of grace; but we must take its full and abundant meaning, part by part. The name means,

1. First, that He *pleads* for us. The word Paraclete is Advocate: one who prays in our behalf.

But St. John says, "If any man sin we have an Advocate (a Paraclete) with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous*." This then is the office of the Son. How then can it be also the office of the

* 1 St. John ii. 1.

Holy Ghost? There is this distinction between the pleadings of the Son and the pleadings of the Holy Spirit. The Son pleads *for* us; the Spirit pleads *in* us. The Son pleads in heaven; the Spirit pleads in our hearts. St. Paul expressly says, "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us*."

And this He does, first, by revealing our sins to us.

It is a part of sin to be unconscious of itself. The soul is stunned and drugged by sin; its spiritual sense is blunt and dead. And it is a part of the Spirit's work to convince the world of sin, that is, to work inwardly upon the spiritual nature of man, and to pour the light of the divine presence upon our darkened souls. This reveals the true nature both of sin and of holiness; they are not outward blots and outward cleansing, but both alike inward, deep and spiritual. When the Spirit teaches us to know ourselves, acts we never thought to be sinful stand out in guilt and blackness. Countless transgressions forgotten, or disregarded, rise up from the depths of an awakened conscience. Childhood, boyhood, youth, give up their testimony and their tale of sins. The flesh and the spirit bear a two-fold witness against us. We seem to be growing darker in the sight of Heaven; when we are only being unmasked to ourselves. We then see ourselves as He sees us always. All life through, this revelation is advancing in those who are truly sanctified.

* Rom. viii. 26.

We see that our sins are not a few unconnected blots, scattered here and there, up and down, a fair surface, which is otherwise pure, but that sin—multiform and inexhaustible—is still all one; that it pervades our whole spiritual nature, tinging it with a hue of darkness, and warping all the powers of life.

This is the first revelation of the Comforter, preparing us for another.

When these spiritual facts are devoutly learned, and not till then, He reveals also the love and the cross of our Redeemer. It is the special promise of our Lord, “He shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you.” What are these things that especially are Christ’s, but the mystery of His passion, of His unknown sufferings, His five wounds of love and of atonement? These are things not to be learned from books, or words, nor from acts of the intellect, or pictures of the imagination. All such are good and helpful; but nothing can reveal to our spiritual sense, to the affections of the heart, and the perceptions of the soul, the length and depth, and breadth and height of His Cross, except the Spirit of Christ alone.

We may *know* these things by the tradition of the Church, but shall never *feel* them till “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts*,” that is, not our love to Him, but His love to us: not a power of loving Him, but a perception of His love—a

* Rom. v. 5.

spiritual consciousness—a *tasting* that the Lord is gracious. “We love Him because He first loved us.” As the sun warms where it falls, so this Divine fire where it lights it kindles. It is this sense of God’s love which opens all the fountains of true sorrow for sin. The only true penitential sorrow is the sorrow of love, the sorrow of a pricked and enlightened heart, that is the true compunction, the mourning of a heart pierced by the thorns and by the nails wherewith our sins crucified the Son of God.

And by this two-fold revelation is fulfilled the promise given by the Prophet:—“I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born*,” this is the intercession of the Spirit: “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered†.”

All true prayer is a gift of God, inspired into penitent hearts: even when most confounded, overwhelmed, and speechless, the very silence of compunction is the pleading of the Comforter, His “groanings which cannot be uttered,” going up

* Zech. xii. 10.

† Rom. viii. 26.

through the intercession of the Son. It is the earthly counterpart of Christ's intercession in heaven.

This is full of consolation to every one who is truly repenting, who stands in fear and amazement at the sight of his own inward iniquity; or who is cast down at the consciousness of strong sins, and of a feeble spirit. He is revealing to you what He sees in you. Learn well this dark mystery; and you shall know that He is the Comforter. His consolations are too deep and real not to begin in sadness. The mourning of repentance is not the melancholy of the world,—the black, bitter, consuming sorrow which worketh death. It is a fresh and subduing sadness, which must enter into every soul of man that would be cleansed from the stain of sin. Where there is no sorrow, there is no repentance; and where there is no repentance, there is no eternal consolation, no gift of life, no vision of God. This then is one part of the Comforter's gracious work in us.

2. Another part of His office is to give us strength,—so the word Comforter literally means: that, is one who joins His strength to ours,—and this He does in mercy to our fallen manhood. The first man was endowed with a Divine gift of strength, which sin has broken, leaving us bruised, impotent, and helpless; the second man, who was conceived and anointed of the Holy Ghost, once more restored to our nature in His own person the power of God. What He wrought in His own person, the Spirit works, so far as man can receive it, in us. The Comforter is come to knit us to Him,

that His strength may be our strength. What is the strength of the Church but the strength of the Comforter? What are all sacraments of grace but gifts of strength? What is baptism but the gift of a life and power above nature? Before the descent of the Comforter there had been baptisms in type, baptisms of water, and baptisms unto repentance, but no baptism unto regeneration. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire*." What again is confirmation but the sevenfold gift of strength—the whole armour of God? What is the sacrament of Christ's body and blood but continual strength to repair continual decays, the true meat, in the strength of which Christ's servants go with ever-growing power "to Horeb, the Mount of God." All our life long, if we be faithful, He is strengthening us. In all trials and temptations, when the furnace is heated sevenfold more hot than at other times, and "the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall†," then He is with us: then He says, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be‡."

You have never been tempted but He has been at your side. In the worst solicitation of the evil one, you have had His help with you if you have been faithful. No power of temptation can make

* St. Matt. iii. 11.

† Isaiah xxv. 4.

‡ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

you sin, if you will invoke His help, and hold fast by His almighty hand. When you fall it is because you will not be strong. In every temptation, day by day, especially your besetting sin, whatever it be, call on the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. There is no fault or sin of flesh or spirit which can get the mastery of you, if you will not betray yourselves. No sin so stubborn, no old habit so inveterate, no infection of heart so deep but He will take it clean away. No change is beyond the power of the Almighty Comforter, the Spirit of the New Creation. "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness*."

3. And lastly, this gracious Name means also that He is the consoler of all that are afflicted. It is His special office to dwell with the widowed and desolate, with the smitten and bereaved. When hearts are riven, and homes are made empty, it is the forerunner of His special coming. Then He pleads with us for God; "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins†?" And when He hath convinced us of our sin, then He reveals the love of God in every particular grief. He expounds to us the need and the intention of the rod. The scourges of God, which plough so deep into the worldly and impatient, bring a peculiar solace to those who pray to the Spirit of

* Isaiah xli. 10.

† Jerem. Lam. iii. 39.

the Comforter for a revelation of His divine purpose. "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." Is it for this? or for that? Is it to teach me some new precept? or to make me unlearn some old evil way? What would He have me to be hereafter? So He teaches us to search out our spirit. This work of consolation has been going on ever since the world began, but specially, and in a fulness of peculiar compassion, since the advent of the Comforter. The gifts of the Spirit through the Church, the discipline of Providence, and the inward chastening of the Cross—these are the means of Christian perfection, the school of saints. The great law of sorrow is so broadly written in Holy Scripture, that there seems no exemption. Sooner or later all are afflicted. You know neither when nor how, but sorrow will come; though it tarry, come it will before you die. But the cross has turned the power of sorrow back upon itself. It was our penalty; it is our purification. When it comes, then comes the Spirit of comfort, consoling in ways inscrutable. Have you not made trial of it? Have you not known in affliction, whether in sickness, in long weariness and distress, or in sorrow, watching a death-bed, foreboding the loss of all you love, or in the first day of solitude when all is over, or in the long and lonely years when life falls back into its old stream again, have you not known something you could not utter; felt something you could not shape even in thought; something rising under you, buoying you upward, lifting

both you and your cross, bearing you upon its surface as the ark which went upon the face of the waters? And what was this? Was it not the love of God? Was it not the presence of the Comforter? Surely it was no mere thought or emotion, no mere influence or grace even from heaven, but a Presence, a Person, Divine, all power, all pity, all love. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee*." This is the fulfilment of His promise ever new and full of power. "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." He will be with you unto the end.

Beware then of all comfort which does not come from Him. All else is worse than vain. In sorrow some people go to the world, to distraction, to friends, to books, to intellectual activity. But these profit nothing.

Beware also of all that thrusts itself between you and His presence. Some people shrink from direct consciousness of His nearness. But the only consolation in repentance, temptation, affliction, is to know and to feel that He is working out His holy will in us, purging out the dross, searching us by a tongue of fire, until He make all pure for the kingdom of God.

And now with one or two short words of counsel let us make an end.

* Isaiah xliii. 2.

First, strive to realize His personal presence with you. We all are wont to talk like philosophers, and Deists, and, alas! to feel as they do. We talk of "Omnipotence," and "Omnipresence," and the like. Hard, repulsive, speculative terms; poor and chilling solace to penitents, and tempted souls; to hearts broken with affliction. There is a great deal of Pantheism in us by nature. We are fond of abstractions, and talk of the "Deity" as of an *idea* and a *presence*, without particular affections. It was to abolish this impersonal and intolerable conception of God, as well as to make Atonement by death, that the Word was made flesh; to teach us that God is not only a divine power, but a loving Person; to bring His presence into our very hearts. We all are conscious how far more ready and direct our affections are to one who is within the sphere of our own nature, to a man rather than to an angel. Therefore in His condescension the Son of God comes to us men, as man. And therefore the Spirit of the Son comes to us invested in all the sympathy of the Son, a very and true Person, with all the divine perfections. Do we not too much slight His holy Presence, and dishonour Him by practically acknowledging little in our daily life beyond the workings of our own intellect and of our own will; dealing with Him as if He were a Name, a formula to express the general law of divine assistance, and not a Person, a Guide, and Friend?

2. The other counsel for our guidance is to follow His inspirations with a ready will. Prompt

obedience, and a pliant submission bring great gifts of grace into the soul. A torpid and insensible conscience drives Him away. You have no need to search for signs and tokens, or works of wonder to attest the presence of the Spirit. "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates*?" "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God†." The true seat of the Spirit's work is our hearts: that is the sphere of His manifested Presence. And the sure tokens of it are in works of faith, and love: in devout meditation, and persevering prayer: in meekness, gentleness, and purity of heart. There are three things specially hateful in His sight—impurity, anger, and pride. Where these are the Comforter will not abide. Grieve Him not so much as by an evil thought. Be of quick understanding, and of a sensitive will in obeying the motions of His Presence. Pray to Him with a direct and special supplication, to as your nearest friend, your guide unto the Father and the Son.

You have before you this day a work of mercy derived from His power and love: your offerings are asked in support of the Hospital attached to this College.

As you are heirs of consolation, so be you also sons. It is through the sympathy of Christ's true servants that the Spirit of the Comforter now works in consoling the sorrows of mankind. To the

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

† Rom. viii. 16.

Church is committed a ministry of mercy; to every one of us in our measure, and according to the distribution of His gifts. Many of you are about to enter upon your appointed task in His kingdom. It is a high office for which you are here preparing. Whether you be called to serve in the office of a pastor of souls, or of a minister of healing, it is a commission from Him who is the only Comforter of fallen man.

This Hospital has two great purposes; and both are sacred. The first is, to sanctify the skill of medicine. The Medical Faculty attached to this College is attended at this time by about two hundred students, to whom not only the discipline and instruction of science is offered, but also the higher and nobler discipline of Divine Truth. Fifteen are already resident within the walls of the College; and nothing stints the number but want of the room necessary for their reception. It is much to be desired that all may be hereafter brought under the rule, and within the precincts, of a collegiate system. I need not here dwell at length on the importance of consecrating the skill of the physician by the grace of truth. A physician ought to be eminently a man of faith: without this the science of healing is degraded into a mere empirical art. Though we may be unable to adjust the details of such a law, yet it is most certain that all gifts of healing, however exercised, are from the Comforter. It is impossible to draw arbitrary lines between what we call miraculous and medicinal agencies.

We cannot know all the causes and agents which are present in any given case. There is one cause always present, of which we take too little account; and that cause is the first in the great harmony of powers. It is, unhappily, the perverse tendency of minds overfull of secondary causes, to forget the first; and, in the complex mechanism of our frame, to miss the indications which bespeak a Divine Presence. It is as unphilosophical as it is faithless to lose, in the multitude of details, the governing idea in which they harmonize. Without this faith what is the most practised physician but an empiric? What is medicine but a fragmentary and uncertain act? All truth is sacred and at unity with itself; and it is only in its divine order and method that knowledge is scientific. All true science finds its perfect solution in faith.

But it is not only that the medical students may be men of faith, but also men of charity, that the discipline of this College is necessary. There is great danger lest the practice of medicine from a ministry of consolation, should be desecrated into a hard, unsympathizing craft; for so it must be, unless they who use it be themselves guided by the Spirit of the Comforter. There is a peculiar tenderness in religious charity; a grace of delicate and sensitive compassion; a reverence for humanity in the anguish of disease; a mournful sympathy with the humiliations of bodily pain; a veneration for the very body, as redeemed by Christ; which alike soothe the sufferer, and exalt the minister of heal-

ing. For this, not only the inculcation of religious truth, but the chastening discipline of a devout life, is needed; and it is one great aim of the collegiate system, on which this Hospital is engrafted, to provide such a discipline of science, hallowed by Christian faith and love.

The other object of this Hospital is, to dispense relief to the suffering. It has already wrought no small work of consolation. In five years (that is, since 1840,) this Hospital has relieved no less than 70,379 sick. In the course of the year past the whole number relieved was 17,093, of whom 15,933 were out-patients, and 1,160 in-patients: of this latter number, not less than 564, nearly one-half, were discharged as cured, and 463 were partially relieved by its care and treatment.

These patients were received from eighteen vast parishes, and certain populous suburbs of this great city; they were gathered out of a population of nearly five hundred thousand souls. The greater part of these are crowded together in the close and noisome streets between the two great thoroughfares of this city, along which wealth and splendour roll in so full a stream. Who can tell what thronging miseries are hid from our sight only by a screen of walls? We little know in the presence of what unutterable sorrows we perpetually dwell. In the dense population of these central parishes there is poverty as gaunt and destitution as naked and abandoned as the earth ever saw. No city in the world has such abrupt and fearful contrasts of luxury and want.

It must be observed that the gates of this Hospital are open to all sufferers; they need no other letter of admission than the presence of disease. Since its first opening four thousand eight hundred patients have been received by letters of recommendation from contributors to its funds, and sixty-six thousand four hundred have been admitted to its relief freely, with no other commendation than their own afflictions. It is therefore in effect a Free Hospital.

Before I leave these details I cannot forbear to state that the physicians and medical officers have taken upon themselves a responsibility amounting to three or four thousands of pounds for the purchase of an additional site, most urgently required, for the extension of the Hospital. It is just and due to those who have so humanely charged themselves with this burden that they should be relieved of it at once by the forward and free offerings of others.

The most blessed office, indeed, is to minister in person to the sorrows of the afflicted. No work of man returns with so full a benediction upon the head of him that fulfils it. Nothing so likens us to our Lord, or invests us with so large a share in the ministration of the Comforter. Sickness and death are terrible and wise instructors. To the pastor and the physician they are most pregnant, and persuasive in all wisdom. No books teach like dying-beds. Blessed are they who can stand by them, and tend them with their own hands. But this is not possible for all.

Blessed, therefore, but only in the next degree, are they who can give of their substance to these works of mercy. This Hospital is a proxy for the busy and laborious. While you are bound down in the toils of secular trades or professions, others bear your alms in consolation to the afflicted; and on you shall their prayers return. Your alms and merciful desires shall not be forgotten where all works of love are remembered.

We little know the aggravations of the poor man's sick or dying bed; our sicknesses are soothed by every consolation on soft couches, and in cleanly chambers; every wish anticipated, every fretful desire allayed by gentle and loving hands. But the poor man's sickness is beset by a thousand aggravations. His very children are a burden. In them he sees his own sorrow multiplied; his pains to them are wretchedness and hunger. We little imagine what are the miseries of this great city: what unknown sufferings hide themselves in foul and crowded homes; or wander about without a pallet or a shelter.

As you would have pity show pity. The ministration of comfort is an angelic ministry, and its rewards shall be eternal. The works and the gifts of mercy are the bonds of unity in Christ's mystical body. When kindred and blood shall pass into the higher relations of our redeemed life there shall be revealed a new order and a new affinity founded upon love, upon alms and prayers here offered up

through the Spirit of the Comforter. Choose your lot with those who mourn now, that you too may be comforted where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither any more pain; for the former things are passed away*."

* Rev. xxi. 4.

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